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SUBJECT: WFP Scaling Back DPRK Operations

Ref: 08 Beijing 03403, 08 Beijing 3552

11. (SBU) Summary: The WFP is scaling back its work in North Korea because of lower than expected donor support as well as new restrictions imposed by the North Korean government, according to World Food Program (WFP) North Korea Country Representative Torben Due. The WFP is refocusing their efforts almost exclusively on young children, whose condition warrants particular concern. While emphasizing the need for additional humanitarian support to address immediate problems, Due also opined that substantial progress on the structural problems underlying the food situation is impossible without comprehensive economic reform. The WFP also noted difficulties obtaining data on China's and Russia's development assistance to North Korea. End Summary.

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Scaling Back Due to Lack of Funds and DPRK  
Restrictions  
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12. (SBU) In a July 1 briefing for Beijing-based diplomats United Nations World Food Program (WFP) North Korea Country Representative Torben Due and Donor Coordination Officer Nanna Skau said the WFP is scaling back the September 2008 emergency operation to provide \$504 million in aid to 6.2 million North Koreans (See Ref) because of a lack of donor support as well as new restrictions imposed by the North Korean government. The WFP has so far received 15 percent of projected donor support, and the lack of funding is currently Due's main concern. Due admitted that the international situation makes it difficult for donors to provide aid to North Korea, but said there is a clear case for humanitarian assistance. Due said increased donor support is needed now since it takes four or five months for food to arrive and the WFP will run out of food in November.

13. (SBU) Because of lower than expected donor contributions to the WFP emergency operation the DPRK government requested that WFP scale back its operations, according to Due. The WFP agreed to reduce its activities to target 57 provinces (vice 131 previously) and close three out of its original five sub-offices. Staff has been reduced from 59 to

18 international staff.

¶4. (SBU) Because of the cutbacks the WFP is now targeting 2.4 million North Koreans in the 57 counties, but even this level of aid depends on the availability of resources. Currently WFP is feeding 1.7 million people and may only be feeding 1.5 million in the near future. The WFP is distributing 4,500 tons per month now, but much more is needed. With reduced capacity, the WFP operation currently is aimed primarily at young children and pregnant and lactating women.

¶5. (SBU) Due and Skau said the WFP continues to insist on adequate monitoring and is usually able to achieve this in their existing program areas. Due opined that the U.S. had been "very right" to insist on transparent monitoring conditions, which are standard worldwide. He expressed frustration with the North Korean authorities for insisting that North Korea is a "special" country with "special rights."

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Observations on DPRK Conditions, Need for Reform  
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¶6. (SBU) Since he arrived in Pyongyang eight months ago Due said he has been struck by the level of malnutrition in the country. He described the short and long-term impacts on child mortality as well as

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on long-term mental development and overall health. Due said North Korea is now in the "lean season" leading up to the fall harvest so more and more children are being taken to hospitals and the food security situation is affecting everyday people. He said he sees a "dark picture" for the most vulnerable members of North Korean society.

¶7. (SBU) Due described the myriad problems in North Korea's agriculture sector and highlighted the absence of mechanization and a lack of fertilizer. Due said results of an FAO crop and food census will be available in October and a UNICEF survey in areas where it operates will be released in December. Together these reports will give a better picture of the overall situation and inform the likely course of future UN humanitarian assistance, according to Due.

¶8. (SBU) Due also commented that addressing North Korea's food situation is broader than just feeding the WFP pipeline. He highlighted the need for reform in the agricultural sector and North Korea's overall economic model. He said that apart from a few small-scale experiments, there is no sign of impending reform of this sort in North Korea. He said bilateral and multilateral assistance addressing the structural issues is more important in the long run, but the WFP is addressing the immediate humanitarian needs that also need to be addressed.

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Assistance Levels from China and Russia Unknown  
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¶9. (SBU) Skau said the WFP office in Beijing has asked the Chinese government several times for information on its assistance to North Korea but has not received any response. She said WFP tracks publicly available trade data but has no clear picture of China's assistance. She said her impression is that China is not doing much outside

of trade, and that the situation is similar with  
Russia.

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